

## Mother Seacole: A Biography

Mary Seacole was born as Mary Jane Grant in 1805 in Kingston, Jamaica. She had a Scottish father and a Jamaican mother. Her father was a soldier and her mother was a local nurse (healer) who knew a lot about medicine. At that time Jamaica was part of the British Empire and it is thought that her parents had met in Jamaica when her father was posted there.

Mary had one brother named Edward and one sister named Louisa.



As Mary lived a long time ago, we do not know a lot about her early life. It is unknown if she went to school but we do know she used to enjoy playing nurses with her dolls. We also know that she spent a lot of time learning how to become a nurse just like her mother. Her mother used plants in her medicines but Mary also learned what other medicines could be used from the British Army doctors. From around twelve years old, Mary helped her mother care for the local people and the British soldiers.

When Mary turned fifteen, she travelled to London by ship and stagecoach with some relatives. She only stayed in London for a year before returning home, but later visited London again for two years.

Most of what we know about Mary has been found out by reading a book she wrote when she was an adult. There are some pictures of Mary and most of them are from when she was older.

On the 10th November 1836, Mary married her love; Edwin Seacole and lived with him in Black River, Jamaica. He was an English merchant. Sadly, Edwin was a sick man and after trying her best to nurse him to health, Edwin died in 1844. Further to that, Mary's mother died shortly after. It was a very sad time for Mary.

After her mother's death, Mary took over her hotel where soldiers stayed when they were sick. Mary worked very hard at looking after the soldiers and got to know many of the soldiers as friends. They called her 'Mother Seacole' because she used to make them their favourite meals and looked after them as if they were her children.

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Mary liked to travel. She had already travelled many times to England but she also travelled to the Bahamas and Cuba to sell pickles and preserves. Later in life, she travelled back to England to live out her later days.

In 1854 Britain went to war. The war was known as the Crimean War and lasted for around two years. Many of the soldiers left Jamaica and were sent to Crimea by the British Army. When Mary heard about the war, she travelled to England to offer her help but it was refused.

Shortly after that, Mary arranged with her friend, Thomas Day, to borrow some money and travel there themselves. In January 1855, Mary set off by ship to travel the 4000 miles across seas to get to the conflict.

Mary and Thomas opened up their own hotel in Crimea near the frontline to help the British soldiers. The soldiers did not have enough food or medicine to get better after they had been injured. The men were sick, cold and dirty. Mary also noticed that there were diseases that were killing the soldiers too, from dirty water and poor hygiene.

The hotel was a haven. The soldiers could get hot food, drinks, blankets, medicines, boots and saddles for their horses. Mary looked after the injured soldiers and nursed them back to health. Mary even rode by horse to the battle to give out food and drinks as well as tend to some men who could not get to the hotel for help. It was dangerous for Mary but she went to help anyway.

After the war had finished, Mary travelled back to London with no money left. When Mary returned to London, the soldiers she had helped wrote letters to the newspapers. They wanted everyone to know what she did to help during the war. They wanted to thank her for her help.

During her later years in London, Mary wrote a book all about her adventures. It was very unusual for a woman during this time to travel around the world and people thought her book was interesting. She was also awarded medals for her bravery and for being selfless.

In 1867, people in Britain raised lots of money to say thank you to Mary for all her work. They wanted to know that she would be able to live comfortably for the rest of her life. Mary had a quiet life after the Crimean War and spent her time between her home in London and her home in Jamaica. When she died in 1881, she left her money to relatives, Thomas Day and to a charity that helped soldiers. She is a true role model to us all!

# Mother Seacole: A Biography

## Comprehension

Who is the biography about?

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Why is Mary called 'Mother Seacole'?

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What features of a biography are used in the text?

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Why do you think the biography is written in an order? Why is it structured in a specific way?

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Who would you recommend this text to?

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## Comprehension

Why has the author written this text?

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Who was Mary's husband? Where was he from?

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When did Mary die?

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Are there any differences about travelling now compared to when Mary was alive?

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What is this text all about?

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Did you learn anything new from the text?

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